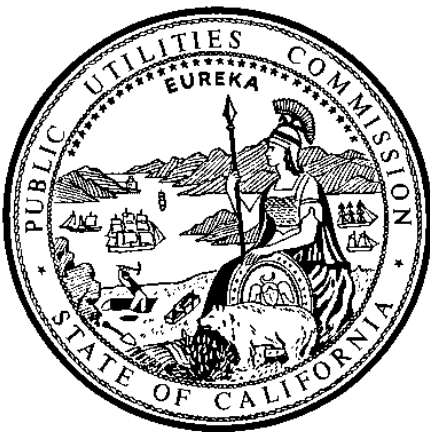


# **Consumer Guide**

to the

# **California**

# **Public Utilities Commission**



**The California Public Utilities Commission (PUC) is the key source for help and information for customers of investor-owned utilities and certain transportation companies in the state. If you use utilities in your home or business, a shuttle service to get to and from the airport, a moving company to move your personal goods, or wonder about the safety of railroads in your community, the PUC is here for you.**

---

## **The Commission**

**Loretta M. Lynch, President**

**Geoffrey F. Brown, Commissioner**

**Henry M. Duque, Commissioner**

**Michael R. Peevey, Commissioner**

**Carl Wood, Commissioner**

Public Utilities Commission  
505 Van Ness Avenue  
San Francisco, CA 94102

(Revised, June 2002)

## About the PUC

California has a long tradition of forging innovation in regulation to protect its residents and businesses. In 1853, before a mile of railroad track had been laid in the state, a law was passed making it illegal to charge more than 20 cents a mile for transporting passengers. In 1873, the Legislature created the State Board of Transportation Commissioners, giving it jurisdiction over railroads.

In 1911, voters passed a Constitutional Amendment setting up the Railroad Commission, making the PUC one of the few utility regulatory commissions that is created by its State Constitution rather than by Legislative Statute.

The Public Utilities Act in 1912 broadened the Railroad Commission's duties and powers to include utilities. In 1946, the name was changed to the California Public Utilities Commission. Its purpose continues today: to regulate privately owned utilities and certain transportation companies in the state and oversee safety of utility and rail systems.

By law, the Commission headquarters is in San Francisco. It also has offices in Los Angeles, Sacramento, and San Diego.

## The Commission Is Many People

The Commission consists of five Commissioners appointed by the Governor, and approved by the State Senate, for terms of six years. Commissioners' terms are staggered to assure that experienced members are always present on the panel. The Commission president chairs the decision-making meetings and other formal sessions, assigns cases among the members, and directs staff. The five Commissioners as a whole make all final decisions on policies and procedures.

The staff of more than 900 people includes Administrative Law Judges (ALJ), engineers, attorneys, support personnel, analysts, economists, accountants, rail and safety experts, consumer representatives, and investigators.

# What the PUC Does

The Commission regulates the rates and services of about 3,400 transportation companies and 1,100 utilities. Utilities include natural gas, electric, water, steam, sewer, pipeline, and telephone companies. Transportation companies include railroads, buses, limousines, airport shuttles, household goods moving companies, and marine vessels.



The Commission also oversees safety standards and procedures for power and communications lines, gas and water facilities, railroad systems, and propane service in mobile home parks. Its inspectors and engineers conduct on-site inspections as part of their regular duties.



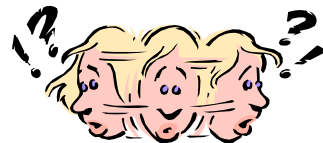
In some cases, state law requires the PUC to prepare an Environmental Impact Report before approving construction of facilities such as transmission lines or pipelines.

In reviewing a utility's request to increase rates, the Commission must balance the public interest in obtaining reliable and safe products and services with the utility's expectations of a fair profit on its investment. In carrying out this responsibility, the Commission encourages participation of all parties affected by its actions, including the customers of the utilities it regulates.

## PUC Services for the Consumer

### Consumer Affairs Branch

**Here to work with you on Telecommunications,  
Energy, and Water Complaints**



Consumers have a right to expect safe and reliable utility service, and assistance with questions or disputes with the utilities.

Since competition began in the telecommunications industry, market conditions affect some telecommunications rates and services. For example, cellular and DSL *rates* are not regulated by the PUC, but it does regulate terms and conditions.

The PUC regulates essential services, such as telephone service that connects to the system through phone lines, and enforces protections against abusive practices.

If you have a complaint about your PUC-regulated phone, electric, natural gas, or water bill or service:

- First, call your utility at the number printed on your bill and discuss the problem with its representatives.
- If talking to your utility does not resolve the problem, you may ask the PUC's Consumer Affairs staff to investigate it.
  - If you file a complaint with the PUC, please provide your name, a daytime phone number where you can be reached, your address, address of the service if different, phone number or account number of the service, utility's name, and describe the problem.
- You may also file a formal complaint with the PUC after consulting with the Consumer Affairs staff.

**To reach Consumer Affairs:**

**Phone:** 800-649-7570

**TTY:** 415-703-2032

**E-mail:** [consumer-affairs@cpuc.ca.gov](mailto:consumer-affairs@cpuc.ca.gov)

**Write or Visit:**

PUC Consumer Affairs  
505 Van Ness Avenue  
San Francisco, CA 94102

**Or visit the Los Angeles Office:**

320 W. 4<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite 500  
Los Angeles, CA 90013

## Outreach

The PUC Outreach Officers interact with communities and their elected officials providing information on current Commission proceedings and consumer education. The Outreach Officers are also available to speak at community meetings. To reach them, call or write:

- **Donna Silvestre - 213-576-7058**  
320 West 4th Street, Suite 500  
Los Angeles, CA 90013
- **John Morgan - 619-525-4309**  
1350 Front Street, Room 4006  
San Diego, CA 92101

## Public Advisor's Office

The Public Advisor's Office coordinates and assists at the PUC hearings that are held throughout the state for consumers' input on important issues. It assists individuals in filing formal complaints with the PUC and encourages and assists interested groups and individuals to participate in Commission proceedings. The office also advises the Commissioners and staff about ways to facilitate public participation where barriers may exist.



**Special accommodations**, such as language interpreters, can be arranged for hearings by calling the Public Advisor's San Francisco Office.

A booklet, which explains how consumers can participate effectively in the PUC's formal proceedings, sample filings, and a bibliography of intervenor compensation, is available from the Public Advisor offices:

**San Francisco Office: - 415-703-2074**

**or (toll free) 866-849-8390**

[public.advisor@cpuc.ca.gov](mailto:public.advisor@cpuc.ca.gov)

**Los Angeles Office: - 213-576-7055**

**or (toll free) 866-849-8391**

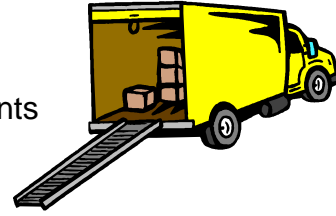
[public.advisor.la@cpuc.ca.gov](mailto:public.advisor.la@cpuc.ca.gov)

**TTY for both offices: - 415-703-5282**

**or (toll free) 866-836-7825**

# Household Goods Movers

The Commission regulates household goods movers that move personal goods from and to points within California.



- Before you contract with a mover, call the PUC to be certain the company is in good standing.
- Get and read the booklet, "Important Information for Persons Moving Household Goods," from the mover.
- Be sure you get an estimate in writing.
- If you have a problem with the move that you cannot resolve with the company, call the PUC:

**800-877-8867 – to verify standing**

**800-FON 4 PUC – to file a complaint**

## Limousines/Shuttles

The Commission regulates the services of for-hire limousine companies and shuttle companies such as those you hire to get to and from the airport or to go to a special event.

- Before you contract with a limousine or shuttle, call the PUC to be certain the company is in good standing.
- If you have a problem with the company that you cannot resolve, call the PUC.

**800-877-8867 – to verify standing**

**800-894-9444 – to file a complaint**

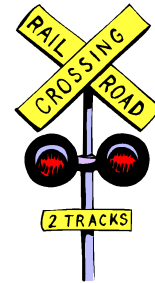
## Utility Safety

If you see wires down or smell gas, call 911 and your local utility immediately. You can also call the PUC about safety of electric or telecommunications lines, natural gas pipelines, or propane gas service in mobile home parks at: **800-755-1447**.



## Rail Safety

The Commission staff inspects rail and rail transit operations, tracks and crossings. Rail transit includes trains or trolleys powered by a cable, a third rail, or overhead electrical lines, such as the Blue Line in Los Angeles and BART in San Francisco. If you have safety related questions, call the office nearest you.



	Railroad	Rail Transit	Rail Crossings
San Francisco	415-703-1306	415-703-2723	415-703-1559
Sacramento	916-327-3239	916-327-1416	916-324-7143
Los Angeles	213-576-7077	213-576-7086	213-576-7081

## Publications

Various publications that describe and explain the activities and programs of the PUC are available without charge on the PUC website and by contacting the PUC Communications Office at 415-703-2669.

## The PUC Website

The PUC website, [www.cpuc.ca.gov](http://www.cpuc.ca.gov), contains a wide range of resources: a Consumer Help Desk, the Commission's Daily Calendar, Business Meeting agendas, division activities, legal documents, a News Room, and links to numerous other websites.



## Frequently Called Numbers

Utility Inquiries: 800-649-7570  
(TTY) 415-703-2032

### Community Outreach

Los Angeles area 213-576-7058  
San Diego area 619-525-4309

### Household Goods Movers

Verify standing 800-877-8867  
File a complaint 800-FON 4 PUC

### Limousines/Shuttles

Verify standing 800-877-8867  
File a complaint 800-894-9444

### Formal Process Questions

San Francisco 415-703-2074  
Toll free 866-849-8390  
Los Angeles 213-576-7055  
Toll free 866-849-8391  
TTY for both 415-703-5282  
TTY for both 800-888-7325



